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The Political Career of W. Kerr Scott: The Squire from Haw River

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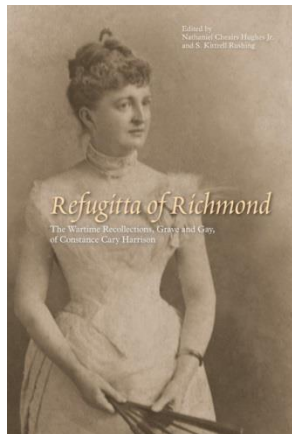
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Library Association for “a significant contribution to the world of books and librarianship through the encouragement of the love of books and reading”. She has been active in SELA as part of the Membership and Mentoring Committee.

BOOK REVIEWS

Refugitta of Richmond The Wartime Recollections, Grave and Gay, of Constance Cary Harrison. Edited by Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr. and S. Kittrell Rushing. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011. ISBN 1-57233-747-8. \$46.00



Opening the first pages of this edited memoir by authors Hughes and Rushing, my initial question was “Refugitta? What does that mean? Was it a nickname for Constance Cary Harrison? Was it an area near Richmond? Was it a family name?” Searching the Index, a reference to page 68 led me to learn Refugitta was the name of a horse loved by Constance whom she described as “a beautiful high spirited little creature I had ridden several times”. Like many of Constance’s detailed writings of her life and adventures in this book, we observed Constance displaying a beautiful high spirit as the famed Refugitta.

Constance Cary Harrison (1840-1920) recorded, in diaries, on pieces of discarded paper, in the stories she wrote, and in her newspaper articles, a significant literary contribution in the female voice of the years before and through the Civil War. Living in Richmond and being a part of the literary circle and social life of the times, Constance gives insights to us of the early administration of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Compared to Mary Boykin Chestnut and Eliza Frances Andrews, Constance is recognized as one of the outstanding memoir writers of the period (Front flyleaf of book, Hughes and Rushing).

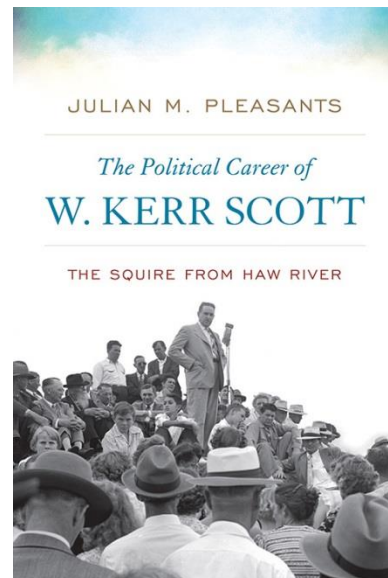
Constance’s intricate stories are easy to read, entertaining and filled with social gossip fit for a serialized movie. Her remembrances are infectious and can be imagined as one might imagine those in English novels. While her memories might not appear to be truth-telling, they open the reader to want to know more about the time from her

perspective. Civil War history is often filled with death, dying, devastation and misery for all involved; but Constance’s remembrances counter those tragedies in this memoir by her writings of light, caring, detailed and mysterious happenings behind the scenes of the battles and the conflicts.

This memoir is Constance’s window on the times and her experiences in and around Richmond and those close to the offices of President Jefferson Davis. It is an entertaining look at the context of the times in the early days of the Civil War. I recommend it for high school and college students who study American History and the Civil War. Also it is a great choice for a book club or for members of associations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, www.hqudc.org. The historical photographs, the Epilogue, the well-developed section, Chapter by Chapter Notes, the Bibliography and the Index provide good primary resources for the researcher.

Dr. Carol Walker Jordan
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The Political Career of W. Kerr Scott: The Squire from Haw River. Julian M. Pleasants. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-8131-4677-5. 414p. \$50.00.



Historian Julian M. Pleasants’ engaging biography, *The Political Career of W. Kerr Scott: The Squire from Haw River*, documents the transformative leadership of a populist politician in mid-twentieth century North Carolina. Framing his study around the years that Scott held office as the state’s Governor and US Senator (1949-1958), Pleasants argues that Scott played a pivotal role in modernizing the state’s economy, improved the quality of life of its most vulnerable citizens, and inspired a new generation of liberal democrats to seek public office. His political career drew upon and helped energize the brief

political ascendancy of Southern liberalism within the Democratic Party. Scott's push to improve roads, medical care, and education for all North Carolina citizens won him a strong following; yet, he also was seen by many politicians and business leaders as controversial and polarizing. During his time in office, Scott would be buffeted by the regional and national headwinds of segregationist politics and strident anti-Communism. This biography reveals how a deepening conservative backlash against southern liberals adversely impacted Scott's political fortunes and forced him to moderate his position on a host of issues including the question of racial segregation.

Who was W. Kerr Scott? Contrary to the negative press accounts of him as an unpolished country rube, Pleasants notes that Scott came from a prosperous and educated farming family. Influenced by the Grange Movement and President Roosevelt's New Deal, Scott decided to run for state office and held the position of Agriculture Commissioner for eleven years. He built up a strong base of support amongst farmers but remained a relative unknown to most North Carolinians. Thus, it was a surprise to many that Scott entered the 1948 Democratic Gubernatorial Primary and mounted a successful grassroots campaign against the Party's entrenched political machine. In explaining this victory, Pleasants argues that Scott's candidacy exposed an ideological and regional rift within the North Carolina Democratic Party. Scott's electoral strategy had been to weave together a coalition of farmers, small businessmen, and African-American voters.

Drawing on newspaper accounts, oral histories, and archival materials, Pleasants details how the newly elected governor translated his core progressive beliefs into sweeping legislation. Scott's "Go Forward" legislative agenda called for the paving of thousands of miles of dirt roads, raising teacher salaries by twenty percent, building or rehabbing schools, and constructing hospitals in isolated rural counties. He also pressured public utilities to bring phone and electrical service to thousands of farming families. Recognizing that many legislators, lobbyists, and business leaders would oppose such enormous state spending, Scott barnstormed the state and distilled his 15 point plan to a simple populist slogan—Better Schools and Roads.

In the area of social and racial progress, Pleasants argues that Scott was a moderate who could carefully press for change and skillfully deflect criticism. He believed that an inclusive government would contribute to the general advancement of civil society. As Governor, he appointed the first woman to the state superior court and a prominent African-American educator to the state School Board. Yet, Pleasants finds that Scott's moderate racial political views were being overtaken by national events and segregationist politicians. For example, Scott seems to have failed to realize the extent of the shift in political attitudes and discourse with his appointment of the liberal Frank Porter Graham to an empty US Senate seat. The subsequent contentious democratic primary revealed how the issue of integration was being used as a political litmus test.

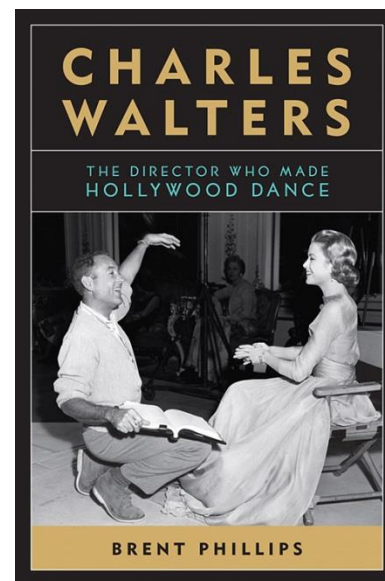
Graham's 1950 primary loss, Pleasants believes, dealt a significant blow to Scott's progressive agenda.

With the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the backlash against Southern liberals solidified around the issue of desegregation. Pleasants argues that Scott immediately recognized that he would need to speak out against school integration if he wanted to remain a viable candidate for public office. After winning a bruising Senate election in 1954, Scott frequently spoke out against integration while actively pursuing progressive legislation for farmers, the elderly, and the poor. Despite witnessing the growing Civil Rights movement, Scott chose to stand with his state and his party and oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1957. With his untimely death in office in 1958, W. Kerr Scott was not able to witness the profound economic and social changes that he helped to foster with his "Go Forward" program. As Pleasants' biography shows, Scott was a key architect in laying the foundation for the rapid modernization of a poor rural state.

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Charles Walters: The Director Who Made Hollywood Dance. Brent Phillips. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8131-4721-5. \$.36.36.



The splendid contents of this marvelous work about movie director Charles Walters include Preface, Chapter One the Anaheim Hooper, Chapter 2. A "New Face" in Town, 3. Beginning the Beguine, 4. The Show is On, 5. Broadway's "Ranking Dancing Juvenile," 6. Backstage, 7. "You Think Like a Director," 8. Putting His Best Foot Forward, 9. A Company Man, 10. Good News, 11. A Swell Couple, 12. Fred and Ginger, 13. Metro-Goldwyn-Schary, 14. Get Happy, 15. "A Dear Dame" 16. Playing the Palace, 17. Hi-Lili, Hi-Lo, 18. "A Masterpiece of Modern Moisture," 19.